

Fraser Voices VFPA Governance Concerns

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Goal of current grassroots action: To help modernize West Coast federal marine port governance by ending the self-gorging self-governance of the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) and ultimately enabling the Fraser River Estuary to be revitalized—crucial in itself and, most relevantly, an excellent indicator of the success of port modernization.

Concerns: VFPA as a law-unto-itself with federal powers

Under the guise of economic growth for the region, province and country, the VFPA uses its ample financial resources and its unaccountable, unelected, non-transparent, self-serving governance to act against the interests of a spectrum of stakeholders. Examples: residents, businesses, landowners, Indigenous Peoples, and the provincial and local governments.

For almost a decade, CEO Robin Silvester has implemented the strategy. Some examples:

1. Interacting imperially with local governments and other coastal and inland ports.
2. Aggressively supporting a massive bridge that would enable deeper dredging, allowing larger ships to go upriver past the Massey Crossing, with immense ecological harm*
3. Allowing the Fraser Surrey Docks coal project, with mishandling of the permit process*
4. Permitting a jet fuel facility on the banks of the Fraser River, with ecological harm*
5. Exorbitantly increasing rents re float homes, pushing residents toward homelessness
6. Outbidding the private sector for ALR lands and industrial properties
7. Failing to ensure predictable long-term leases with tenants, e.g. West Coast Reduction
8. Pushing out agricultural-sector infrastructure from the waterfront—for more containers
9. Defunding the National Port Enforcement policing team, further entrenching the Port as a gateway for criminal activity
10. Mismanaging container trucking issues that led to a costly strike in 2014
11. Ignoring rail capacity constraints on the South Shore of Burrard Inlet—leading to multi-commodity terminal congestion
12. Eliminating cruise ship capacity without consulting the BC tourism sector
13. Acting as proponent for projects that are beyond the federal marine port mandate
14. Pushing Roberts Bank Terminal 2, with immense ecological harm*, competing with Canadian private-sector interests, despite enough capacity for projected growth
15. Disrupting the endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales*, despite claiming to protect them, by adding much ship traffic that could be served by Prince Rupert, etc.
16. Displacing roles of formerly credible environmental programs*: Burrard Inlet Environmental Action Program (BIEAP) and Fraser River Estuary Management Program (FREMP)

* For details about the VFPA's ecological harm, please see [Let the Fraser live.](#)



14 Concerns about the VFPA

- 1 Lack of transparency, objectivity and collaboration. Treats other Canadian authorities as competitors, instead of working collaboratively.
- 2 Bias—the VFPA solution is the only one.
- 3 Abuse of dominant position:
 - VFPA does not pay property taxes—instead deciding how much they will pay to local governments in lieu (not the assessed amount).
 - VFPA disregards land use designations at will; at least in effect, for example, they take land out of the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).
 - VFPA can expropriate.
 - VFPA is the sole arbiter in setting lease terms, length and annual rents.
- 4 VFPA is both the proponent of projects and the approver and regulator (fox in the chicken coop privilege).
- 5 The VFPA mission and goals are not compatible with their role as landlord and overseer of ports. Their focus recently has been land acquisition. Two examples: the Gilmore Farm in Richmond, which is in the ALR; a railroad property adjacent to the BC Rail-operated Port Subdivision.
- 6 Selectivity of information dissemination. Often the public is left out, such as when VFPA distributed a newsletter to government departments only.
- 7 Obstructive in responding to Access to Information requests.
- 8 Perceived autonomy despite the provisions of the Canada Marine Act, which already permits the Minister of Transport to oversee port authorities.
- 9 Consistent and ongoing lobby in Ottawa.
- 10 Failure to listen to alternative views and consult in a meaningful open manner.
- 11 Power to influence reviews—such as determining terms of reference for an environmental assessment. For Roberts Bank Terminal 2, VFPA lobbied successfully to limit the review to the port footprint, ignoring negative impact from trucking and rail, as well as wildlife impacts in the Strait of Georgia.
- 12 Board representation is stacked. Most appointees are by the Federal Government on recommendations from port users. The four western provinces have only two appointees (one from BC), and the 16 municipalities hosting port operations have only one. There is no Indigenous representation and none with an environmental focus.
- 13 Lip service to complaints about noise and air pollution. Too ready to duck and pass the buck.
- 14 Use of evidence with vital information that is incorrect, omitted, contradictory and/or misleading (e.g., re Roberts Bank Terminal 2).